

IN THE CLAIMS

Please cancel Claims 78-79, 90, and 96-97 without prejudice, amend Claims 70, 73, 74,
5 75, 80, 87, 89, 91, 94, and 95, and add new Claims 98-102 as follows:

1. – 69. (Cancelled)

70. (Currently amended) Saddle pad apparatus adapted to support a saddle while
maintaining both substantially unimpeded movement of the spinal column of a living subject and a
10 desirable balance of a saddle and rider, comprising:

a first pad disposed laterally to one side of said spine and a second pad disposed laterally to
the other side of said spine so that said first and second pads straddle said spinal column and are
sufficiently distant therefrom so that said saddle pad apparatus does not impede movement of the
spinal column of said living subject by forming a space between said spinal column and said saddle
15 pad apparatus, each of said pads being adapted to individually cooperate with ~~one or more~~ a
respective one of withers region gaps or recesses of the anatomy of the living subject;

wherein ~~at least a portion of said one or more~~ gaps or recesses are disposed in the withers
region of the subject; and

wherein said pads are configured to raise the saddle at least partly off of only said withers
20 region of the animal, so as to substantially avoid contact of said saddle with the top of the
withers, thereby substantially eliminating pressure points in said withers region and maintaining
said balance.

71. (Previously presented) The apparatus of Claim 70, further comprising a third and a
fourth pad so that said apparatus comprises four discrete pads, two per side of the spine.

25 72. (Previously presented) The apparatus of Claim 70, wherein at least one of said pads
varies in thickness.

73. (Currently amended) The apparatus of Claim 70, wherein ~~at least a portion of said~~
~~plurality of~~ first and second pads are formed from a visco-elastic foam material.

74. (Currently amended) The apparatus of Claim 70, wherein said ~~plurality of~~ first and
30 second pads are disposed in pockets formed substantially between a first layer of material and a
second layer of material.

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75. (Currently amended) The apparatus of Claim 74, wherein said ~~plurality of first and second~~ pads are made removable from said pockets via Velcro strips disposed at seams of said pockets.

76. (Previously presented) The apparatus of Claim 74, wherein said first layer and second layer comprise sheepskin and a fiber-based material, respectively, said sheepskin being disposed to contact the skin of said living subject, said fiber-based material being disposed to contact said saddle.

77. (Previously presented) The apparatus of Claim 76, wherein said living subject comprises an equine.

78. (Cancelled)

79. (Cancelled)

80. (Currently amended) Saddle pad apparatus adapted to support a saddle on a living subject, comprising:

a plurality of pads that distribute load from said saddle substantially evenly on said living subject to avoid contact with the living subject's spinal column over only a plurality of non-contiguous regions of said living subject's anatomy such that during riding said saddle is substantially stable around a rotational axis transverse to the longitudinal axis of the spinal column of said subject, said pads further elevating only a front portion of said saddle so as to maintain said substantial stability around said axis;

wherein said plurality of pads are disposed laterally to said spine in pockets formed substantially between a first layer ~~and a second layer of material; and~~

~~wherein said first layer and second layer comprise~~ comprising sheepskin having a pelt hair length between ¾ inch and 1 inch, and a second layer comprising a fiber-based material, ~~respectively,~~ said sheepskin being disposed to contact the skin of said living subject, said fiber-based material being disposed to contact said saddle.

81. (Previously presented) The apparatus of Claim 80, wherein said plurality comprises four discrete pads, two per side of the spine, each of said four pads being adapted to cooperate with a recess or gap within the anatomy of the subject.

82. (Previously presented) The apparatus of Claim 80, wherein at least one of said pads varies in thickness.

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83. (Previously presented) The apparatus of Claim 80, wherein at least a portion of said plurality of pads are formed from a visco-elastic foam material.

84. (Previously presented) The apparatus of Claim 80, wherein said plurality of pads are made removable from said pockets via Velcro strips disposed at seams of said pockets.

5 85. (Previously presented) The apparatus of Claim 83, wherein said living subject comprises an equine.

86. (Previously presented) The apparatus of Claim 85, wherein said apparatus is further adapted to support said saddle while maintaining substantially unimpeded movement of the spinal column of said living subject.

10 87. (Currently amended) A saddle pad adapted for use with a saddle on ~~[[an]]~~ a high-withered equine, comprising:

first and second substantially flexible elements having roughly the same shape, said first and second elements being bound together in at least a plurality of locations along their periphery, said first element comprising a ~~thick~~ sheepskin and being in direct contact with the skin of said equine;
15 and

a plurality of compressible visco-elastic foam pad elements disposed between said first and second flexibly elements, said pad elements straddling the spine of said equine at a distance whereby said saddle pad is not in contact with the spinal column of said equine during riding,

20 wherein said pad elements are disposed and configured to substantially fill respective ones of gaps that occur on the anatomy of said high-withered equine in its withers region, thereby substantially relieving this region from excessive pressure and contact with said saddle in a gullet channel which would otherwise exist without said pad elements ~~substantial weight redistribution of said saddle in a front-back direction is frustrated by said pad elements~~; and

25 wherein said unimpeded spine movement, said frustration of redistribution, and said first flexible element cooperate to provide reduced discomfort for said equine during said riding.

88. (Previously presented) The saddle pad of Claim 87, further comprising at least one peripheral ridge disposed substantially along a front or back periphery of said first and second elements, said peripheral ridge cooperating with an edge of said saddle to substantially frustrate relative motion between said saddle pad and said saddle in at least one direction during riding.

30 89. (Currently amended) A saddle pad adapted for use, with a saddle, on an equine, comprising:

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first and second substantially flexible elements having roughly the same shape, said first and second elements being bound together in at least a plurality of locations along their periphery, said first element comprising sheepskin in direct contact with the skin of said equine and said second element comprising a fiber-based material disposed to contact said saddle;

5 a plurality of compressible visco-elastic foam pad elements disposed between said first and second flexible elements, ~~a first portion of said plurality of pad elements having a first shape and an optional second portion of said plurality of said pad elements having a second shape, said pad elements~~ adapted to straddle the spine of said equine with at least a portion of said plurality disposed within said saddle pad and sufficiently distant from said spine such that the movement of
10 the spine of said equine is substantially unimpeded by said saddle and said pad elements during riding,

first and second restraining straps affixed to at least said second flexible element, said straps each being adapted for substantially concealed tethering to said saddle; and

at least one peripheral ridge disposed substantially along a front or back periphery of said
15 first and second elements, said peripheral ridge cooperating with an edge of said saddle to substantially frustrate relative motion between said saddle pad and said saddle in at least one direction during riding;

wherein said pad elements ~~having said first shape~~ are adapted to interface only with gaps formed in the withers region of said equine so as to prop up only a front portion of said saddle and provide a substantially invariant relationship between said saddle and said equine during
20 ambulation of said equine animal, ~~whereas said optional pad elements having said second shape are adapted to interface with gaps formed in the region of the animal directly under a rear portion of said saddle.~~

90. (Cancelled)

25 91. (Currently amended) A pad element comprising a plurality of substantially rounded edges adapted for use in a saddle pad, wherein said pad element is formed from a visco-elastic foam and is adapted for selective removal from said saddle pad by a user; and

wherein said pad element is particularly shaped to accommodate and fit substantially within a particular withers region ~~artifact~~ recess on the anatomy of an animal on which said pad
30 element and saddle pad is utilized.

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92. (Previously presented) The pad element of Claim 91, wherein said pad element has a plurality of densities associated therewith in its uncompressed state.

93. (Previously presented) The pad element of Claim 92, wherein said plurality of densities are substantially stratified with respect to the width dimension of said element.

5 94. (Currently amended) Apparatus adapted for use on high-withered animals, comprising:

a substantially flexible pad comprising a plurality of pockets formed substantially between a first layer and a second layer of material and adapted to capture respective ones of pad elements;

10 ~~wherein said first layer and second layer comprise~~ comprising sheepskin and a second layer comprising fiber-based material, ~~respectively~~, said sheepskin being disposed to contact the skin of said high-withered animals, said fiber-based material being disposed to contact a saddle;
a plurality of visco-elastic foam pad elements captured by respective ones of said pockets;
wherein said pad elements and said pad cooperatively form a raised feature element to
15 raise only a frontal portion of a saddle disposed over top of said pad elements with respect to a withers region in order to mitigate tilting or rocking of the saddle.

95. (Currently amended) The apparatus of Claim [[61]] 94, further comprising a pad interface adapted to interface between said pad and said animal, said pad interface adapted to (i) dissipate localized pressure; (ii) dissipate heat; and (iii) dissipate moisture.

20 96.-97. (Cancelled)

98. (New) The apparatus of Claim 80, wherein said sheepskin comprises Australian Merino sheepskin.

99. (New) The apparatus of Claim 80, wherein said sheepskin comprises a chemical treatments adapted to improve at least one of stain resistance or ultraviolet fading of said
25 sheepskin.

100. (New) The apparatus of Claim 98, wherein said sheepskin comprises a chemical treatments adapted to improve at least one of stain resistance or ultraviolet fading of said sheepskin.

101. (New) The saddle pad of Claim 87, wherein said second substantially flexible
30 element comprises square quilted fabric, said fabric providing reduced bunching of the second element under said saddle during use.

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102. (New) The saddle pad of Claim 87, wherein said sheepskin comprises Australian Merino sheepskin.